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Culture

CONSERVATION FUNDAMENTALS.

A radio talk by F. A. Silcox, Chief Forester, United States Forest Service, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour, Friday, February 2, 1934, broadcast by a network of 43 associate NBC stations.

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The true conservationist is not a zealot who would travel up and down the land locking up the treasures of Nature against the use and enjoyment of the public. In fact, he is quite the opposite. He believes as much as anyone in making our natural resources available for the permanent welfare and highest development of our country.

Ever since the establishment of the United States Forest Service more than a quarter century ago, our practical, working definition of conservation has been this: "Conservation is wise use."

In practicing wise use, we think of continuance, of permanence, of maintenance of the basic resource. We mean that we should use our resources, but not use them up. Conservation provides for today, but in providing, it remembers the tomorrows.

Although it is often obscured during periods of colorful but reckless expansion, there is a strong thread of thrift running through the fabric of American character. We don't like waste. We have been spending our forest resources like the prodigal son, but we can see our mistakes. We can realize that waste makes want. We can realize that if we cut ruthlessly, clear land carelessly, or let flood and fire do their worst, our children will not have adequate forests, and within our own lifetime much of the richest country on earth will become wasted and worthless for sustaining a strong and independent people.

Our forests must be maintained as a permanent asset. They must be maintained not only to insure our future supplies of timber but to preserve other economic and social benefits vital to national welfare. They must be preserved for the protection of our major watersheds, for their services in the maintenance of water supplies, in the prevention of erosion, and in holding back of flood waters. They must be preserved as the home of our game and wildlife resources, and for their recreational and scenic values.

Conservation of the forests in many communities means the continuation of local industries. A good forest, managed as a permanent resource, means regular jobs. Often the continued life and progress of the community is dependent upon the maintenance of the surrounding forests.

The fundamental principle of forest conservation is the management of forest land for continuous production. Timber is a crop that can be grown over and over again on the same land. Under proper management, timber can be harvested from the forest without destroying the capacity of the land to grow more timber. With proper management, we can also use our forests without destroying their values for watershed protection, for safeguarding wildlife, or for recreation. With carefully planned, forward-looking management, we can use them continuously. This is what we mean when we say conservation is wise use.

(over)

And the extension of this practical conservation -- of adequate, carefully planned systems of management for continuous use-to-all our basic forest resources is essential to individual and national well-being. Wider recognition of this fact is a distinctive feature of the new era we have entered.

Protection of our forests from fire and other destructive agencies of, of course, necessary to conservation. But the immediate situation calls for even more. It calls for building up where we have destroyed. Lands that have been laid waste must be brought back to productivity. Critical watersheds must be revegetated. Fortunately, conservation, so long neglected, has been forcefully brought to the attention of the people while there is still time to check some of the ravages of ill-advised use. We must make the most of our opportunities to turn the tide toward a wisely planned management of our resources. Experience has taught the folly of waste, and time has brought about a better understanding of the job ahead of us. Every year of delay costs the United States some 800,000 acres of land denuded and millions more depleted to a dangerous degree.

Conservation has a popular quality rooted in the wisdom and experience of the race. There is something of the "one for all," and "all for one" in the conservation ideal that fits in with our form of popular government. The public forest policy of the country is properly aimed at the goal of "the greatest good to the greatest number in the long run."

With wisely planned and unified management of our resources, we can look to far-reaching results. We can look to increased employment, to expanded purchasing power, to added national income. Through a broadly conceived conservation program, we can seek to settle on the land surplus industrial labor and migratory agricultural labor; to intensify and stabilize the production of agricultural, forage, and forestry crops on appropriate soils; to bring about effective utilization of water resources for electric power, irrigation and navigation to prevent soil erosion and floods; to rehabilitate and modernize rural centers; to promote health, prosperity, and well-being.

Our government is working toward all these objectives on many fronts. But what is being done now in large-scale emergency undertakings must be solidified into a continuous and coordinated program. Conservation agencies must unite in a common purpose.

I look forward to seeing in every locality a progressive and intensive conservation program in which all interests will cooperate in working out effective localized resource management -- all in line with broad, national conservation ideals. We must have unity of conception as well as unity of execution in our conservation effort.

And in the last analysis, the success of the conservation ideal is dependent upon the whole-hearted cooperation of the public. We can't get very far toward giving our resources full protection and constructive management unless every one of us plays the game.

What this country needs is 120,000,000 conservationists.